



**MARIN THEATRE OPENS 2024/25 SEASON
WITH U.S. PREMIERE OF
ACCLAIMED NOIR MYSTERY-MEETS-FOLK TALE
“YAGA”**

OCTOBER 10 – NOVEMBER 3, 2024

MILL VALLEY, CA (27 August 2024) — New Artistic Director **Lance Gardner** launches **Marin Theatre’s** 2024/25 season with the U.S. premiere of the critically acclaimed noir mystery-meets-folk tale *Yaga*, by award-winning Canadian playwright **Kat Sandler**. Hailed by *The Globe and Mail* as “Delightfully devious. Sandler has triumphantly reclaimed the evil-woman myth. Move over, *Wicked* and *Maleficent*, and welcome *Yaga* to the sisterhood,” *Yaga* follows a big-city private eye who finds himself in a small, isolated town wondering what the disappearance of a yogurt empire heir has to do with random lore about an old witch. He joins forces with a local police officer, to zero in on a cast of curious characters including a sexy, whip-smart forensic bone expert whose shadowy past includes her healthy appetite for young men. What begins as a classic whodunit veers into the supernatural as the mythic Baba Yaga, rumored to keep a magic hut in the woods where she grinds the bones of the wicked, is revealed as a character in this crime tale. Noted theatre director **Barbara Damashek**, who has helmed local productions at Berkeley Rep, Aurora Theatre, Magic Theatre, and the multi-Tony Award-nominated Broadway production of *Quilters*, is set to direct this dark comedy. The cast features **Rachel Clausen**, **Adam KuveNiemann**, and **Julia McNeal**, all playing multiple characters. *Yaga* will be performed **October 10 – November 3, 2024** (*press opening: October 15*) at Marin Theatre, 397 Miller Avenue, Mill Valley. Tickets (\$30-\$85) are available at **MarinTheatre.org** or by calling **415-388-5208**.

“*Yaga* is the first play I chose for the first season under my new leadership. Our selection committee unanimously loved this script,” said Marin Theatre Artistic Director **Lance Gardner**. “*Yaga* has everything that a play should have; it’s hilarious, absorbing, and keeps you guessing until the very end. It is also a terrific showpiece for actors, who play three solid leads but also

make chameleon changes into a range of other characters – watching them shapeshift is part of the fun. It will appeal to people who want to laugh, but there's enough mystery to keep your mind as involved as your funny bone.”

Yaga made its world premiere in September 2019 at Toronto’s Tarragon Theatre, where the *Toronto Star* declared it “Hilarious. Enjoyable and satisfying. An ambitious vehicle for great actors to strut their stuff.” It has since played across Canada and in the U.K., winning a nomination for the Dora Mavor Moore Award for Outstanding New Play. Victoria B.C.’s *Nexus* described it as perfect for “those who love a good take on a murder mystery, whether it’s an old-fashioned Agatha Christie novel or an episode of ‘CSI,’ and love to play detective and try to figure out who did it.” *Theatre Weekly* described it as “Clever. Whimsical with a modern and funny twist. A bewitching way to spend an evening.”

Giving a voice to an antihero of epic proportions, Sandler focuses the work on the mythical Baba Yaga. Originally a witch or ogress from Slavic folklore, Baba Yaga was known for living in a forest hut that moved about on tall chicken legs. Mussorgsky musically depicted her avian house in his *Pictures at an Exhibition* (1847) and in Dvořák’s opera *Rusalka* (1901), the witch Ježibaba is the Czech version of the same character. Sometimes described as flying or riding about in a mortar clutching a pestle, she is depicted as both wicked and good, a healer and a cannibal with a special taste for children who misbehave. She sometimes helps heroes and heroines on their journeys and can fit the archetype of a mother goddess, or a fairy godmother – albeit a sinister one. She is also the guardian of the fountains of the waters of life, seen as embodying female empowerment and independence. The word “baba” means grandmother or old woman in Serbian, Macedonian, Croatian, Bosnian, and Bulgarian. In modern Polish and Russian, “baba” is also a pejorative term meaning an old, dirty, or addled woman. But in recent years focus has shifted to her feminine powers; in 2017 she was the subject of the popular book *Ask Baba Yaga: Otherworldly Advice for Everyday Troubles* by Taisia Kaitaiskala.

For this production of *Yaga*, Marin Theatre has assembled a stellar cast including **Julia McNeal** who returns to Marin Theatre where she began her Bay Area theatre career in *Visions of Kerouac*. She has performed locally with A.C.T., Berkeley Rep, the Magic Theatre, Shotgun Players, San Francisco Playhouse and is a company member of PlayGround San Francisco.

McNeal helped found the Obie-Award-winning Cucaracha Theatre in New York and Los Angeles' Echo Theater Company. Her film and TV credits include “The Unbelievable Truth” “Flesh and Bone” “Law & Order,” and “Law & Order: SVU” and she is the author/creator the book of *Five Ways In to Character*.

Joining McNeal in *Yaga* is **Adam KuveNiemann** who returns to Marin Theatre where he was last seen in *Oslo*. He has performed with Bay Area theatre companies including A.C.T., Center REP, San Francisco Shakespeare Festival, New Conservatory Theatre Center, Berkeley Rep, Oakland Theater Project, San Francisco Playhouse, Z Space, Shotgun Players, and Curtain Theatre.

Rounding out the *Yaga* cast is **Rachel Clausen** who will be making her Marin Theatre debut. She has performed locally and throughout the nation with arts organizations including Berkeley’s Youth Musical Theater Company, Pioneer Theatre Company, Elm Shakespeare Company, Camden Shakespeare Festival, and Bread Loaf Acting Ensemble.

Barbara Damashek will direct Marin Theatre’s production of *Yaga*. She is a director, actress, teacher, and composer, who has helmed plays around the Bay Area, including at Berkeley Repertory Theatre, Aurora Theatre, Magic Theatre, Aurora Theatre Company, and throughout the U.S. at Oregon Shakespeare Festival, South Coast Repertory, Actors Theatre of Louisville, American Repertory Theater, Trinity Repertory Company, Mark Taper Forum/Center Theatre Group, and the Denver Center for the Performing Arts Theatre Company. She was the author, lyricist, composer, and director of *Quilters*, nominated for six Tony Awards including Best Musical, Book, Original Score, and Direction.

The design team bringing this production of *Yaga* to life on stage will include **Carlos Aceves** (set design), **Kurt Landisman** (lighting design), **Matt Stines** (sound design), and **Meg Neville** (costume design).

Kat Sandler is an award-winning Canadian screenwriter, playwright, director and the artistic director of Theatre Brouhaha in Toronto. She has staged seventeen of her original plays including *Yaga* (Tarragon Theatre) and the simultaneous double bill of *The Party and The*

Candidate (The Citadel Theatre), where the same cast raced back and forth between two theatres to perform in two simultaneous political farces. Her theatre/tv hybrid *Late Night*, produced with Moses Znaimer, recently aired on VisionTV. Her play *Mustard* (Tarragon Theatre) won the Dora Mavor Award for Best New Play; *Bang Bang* and *Yaga* were both nominated for the same award. She won the Austen Film Festival's inaugural Fiction Podcast Award for *How To Build a Fire*, and has been nominated for Sterling Awards, the Carol Bolt Award, and the Cayle Chernin Award. Kat attended the Canadian Film Centre and eOne's inaugural Adaptation Lab. She has written for Netflix's *Kim's Convenience*, and written fiction podcasts for The Koffler Centre, CBC's PlayMe and TwoUp's Limetown. She has various film and television projects in development with eOne, TB Content, Scythia Films, Stellar Citizens and the Donaldson Company.

ABOUT MARIN THEATRE

Marin Theatre was founded in 1966 as the Mill Valley Center for the Performing Arts (MVCPA). It later changed its name to Marin Theatre Company (MTC) and by 1987 had become a professional theatre company, joining with other Bay Area theatres to negotiate the first regional Actors' Equity contract in the Bay Area. MTC joined the League of Resident Theatres (LORT) and the National New Play Network (NNPN) in 2008. Now rechristened **Marin Theatre**, the company is the leading professional theatre in the North Bay and the premier mid-sized theatre in the Bay Area. In the fall of 2023, **Lance Gardner** was appointed artistic director. Well known for his many leading appearances on stage at major theatres around the Bay, he also served as president of the Board of Trustees at Aurora Theatre and was live event producer at *KQED* before assuming this role at Marin Theatre. Marin Theatre's 2024/25 season is the first programmed by Gardner, who has assembled a collection of acclaimed plays that offer Bay Area audiences their first looks at funny, engaging, entertaining, and compelling works that have been hits in Canada, the U.K., New Zealand, and in other parts of the U.S.

FOR CALENDAR EDITORS:

WHAT: New Artistic Director **Lance Gardner** launches **Marin Theatre's** 2024/25 season with the U.S. premiere of the critically acclaimed noir mystery-meets-folk tale *Yaga*, by award-winning Canadian playwright **Kat Sandler**. Hailed by *The Globe and Mail* as "Delightfully devious. Sandler has triumphantly reclaimed the evil-woman myth. Move over, *Wicked* and *Maleficent*, and welcome *Yaga* to the sisterhood," *Yaga* follows a big-city private eye who finds himself in a small, isolated town wondering what the disappearance of a yogurt empire heir has to do with random lore about an old witch. He joins forces with a local police officer, to zero in on a cast of curious characters including a sexy, whip-smart forensic bone expert whose shadowy past includes her healthy appetite for young men. What begins as a classic whodunit veers into the supernatural as the mythic Baba Yaga, rumored to keep a magic hut in the woods where she grinds the bones of the wicked, is revealed as a character in this crime tale. Noted theatre director

Barbara Damashek, who has helmed local productions at Berkeley Rep, Aurora Theatre, Magic Theatre, and the multi-Tony Award-nominated Broadway production of *Quilters*, is set to direct this dark comedy. The cast features **Rachel Clausen**, **Adam Kuvemmann**, and **Julia McNeal**, all playing multiple characters.

WHEN: **October 10 – November 3, 2024**
Previews: October 10 - 13, 2024 (7:30pm Thurs/Fri/Sat, 4:00pm Sun)
Press Opening: 7:30pm, Tuesday, October 15
Closes: November 3, 2024

SHOWS: Wednesdays-Fridays: 7:30pm
Saturdays: 2:00pm & 7:30pm
Sundays: 2:00pm
Thursday, Oct. 31 – 1:00pm

WHERE: **Marin Theatre**, 397 Miller Avenue, Mill Valley, CA 94941

TICKETS: **\$30-\$85**

INFO: Information and tickets are available at **MarinTheatre.org** or by calling **415-388-5208**

-30-

PRESS: Courtney Heimbeck, CBCO Public Relations & Marketing,
courtney@cb-pr.com | 650-308-4390

PHOTOS: Downloadable high-res photos are available here: <https://cbpr.co/press/yaga/>